Rules of the Game
Ranged Attacks (Part Two)
By Skip Williams

Last week, we considered the basics of ranged combat. This week, we'll consider the ins and outs of thrown weapons.

Using Thrown Weapons

As noted in Part One, a thrown weapon is something that you launch at a target yourself. Also as noted in Part One, your Dexterity modifier affects your attack roll with a thrown weapon and your Strength modifier affects your damage roll if your attack hits (except for splash weapons; see below).

Because you're throwing the weapon itself, you must draw it before you can attack with it. Drawing a weapon requires a move action, leaving you with only a standard action for the attack. Because you're attacking with a standard action, you can make only a single attack. If you have a base attack bonus of at least +1 you can draw a weapon as part of a regular move (see page 141 in the *Player's Handbook*). See *Rules of the Game: All About Movement* for a discussion of exactly what a regular move is. In this case, you're still using a move action for the regular move, and you're still limited to attacking as a standard action.

If you can draw your thrown weapon without using an action, or as a free action, you can throw as a full-round action and make iterative attacks with several thrown weapons (one per attack) if your base attack bonus allows. One easy way to manage this trick is by taking the Quick Draw feat, which lets you draw weapons as free action.

Thrown weapons tend to be fairly sturdy and usually aren't destroyed when you throw them. Splash weapons, however, are expended when you use them.

Throwing Melee Weapons

You can throw any melee weapon whose statistics don't include a range increment, provided you can wield it in one or two hands. You can hurl such a weapon up to 50 feet; it effectively has a range increment of 10 feet.

You always take a -4 penalty for nonproficiency when you throw a weapon that's not meant to be thrown -- it just doesn't work well in that role. Throwing a melee weapon that's not suitable for ranged attacks requires a standard action if you can wield it in one hand. If you must use two hands to wield the weapon, throwing it requires a full-round action. Because you need a standard or full-round action to throw such a weapon once, you cannot make iterative attacks when doing so.

Some Selected Thrown Weapons

Here are a few thrown weapons worth discussing, either because they're a little strange or just because doing so will allow us to cover a few points we haven't examined yet.

Dagger: A dagger is one of several thrown weapons that you can use in melee or at range. It works just like a melee weapon when you use it in a melee attack. When you chuck the dagger at a target, you treat it as a thrown weapon. Use your Dexterity modifier for the attack roll when you throw it, and then use your Strength modifier for the damage roll if your attack hits. When you make a ranged attack by throwing a dagger, the act provokes attacks of opportunity, as noted in Part One, even though you can make melee attacks with the dagger that do not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Because a dagger has a range increment of only 10 feet, you almost always take a range penalty when throwing it.

Javelin: These lightweight spears are cheap and have a fairly decent range increment of 30 feet, which makes their maximum range 150 feet.

A javelin is one of several ranged weapons that you can use in melee even though they're not really suited for the job. When you make a melee attack with a javelin, you resolve the action just like any other melee attack, except that you always have a nonproficiency penalty (-4) on your attack roll.

Shuriken: These little throwing stars work just like ammunition (see Part Three). On the plus side, you don't need to use an action to draw a shuriken, which means you can throw more than one of them if you use the full attack action and if your base attack bonus allows multiple attacks. On the negative side, you tend to use up shuriken as you throw them.

Shuriken are on the list of special monk weapons, so a monk character can use the flurry of blows class feature to throw extra shuriken when using the full attack action.

Splash Weapons

These thrown weapons break on impact, scattering their contents, which usually are liquid.

> **From page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> **THROW SPLASH WEAPON**
>
> A splash weapon is a ranged weapon that breaks on impact, splashing or scattering its contents over its target and nearby creatures or objects. Most splash weapons consist of liquids, such as acid or holy water, in breakable vials such as glass flasks. (See Special Substances and Items, page 128, for particulars about several different splash weapons.)
>
> To attack with a splash weapon, make a ranged touch attack against the target. Thrown weapons require no weapon proficiency, so you don't take the -4 nonproficiency penalty. A hit deals direct hit damage to the target, and splash damage to all creatures within 5 feet of the target.
>
> You can instead target a specific grid intersection. Treat this as a ranged attack against AC 5. However, if you target a grid intersection, creatures in all adjacent squares are dealt the splash damage, and the direct hit damage is not dealt to any creature. (You can't target a grid intersection occupied by a creature, such as a Large or larger creature; in this case, you're aiming at the creature.)
>
> If you miss the target (whether aiming at a creature or a grid intersection), roll 1d8. This determines the misdirection of the throw, with 1 being straight back at you and 2 through 8 counting clockwise around the grid intersection or target creature. Then, count a number of squares in the indicated direction equal

to the range increment of the throw. So, if you miss on a throw out to two range increments and roll a 1 to determine the misdirection of the throw, the splash weapon lands on the intersection that is 2 squares away from the target in the direction toward you. See the accompanying diagram.

After you determine where the weapon landed, it deals splash damage to all creatures in adjacent squares.

Because most splash weapons' damage is derived from the properties inherent in their contents (for example fire damage from a flask of alchemist's fire), your Strength modifier usually doesn't apply to a splash weapon's damage.

When you throw a splash weapon, you either aim the weapon directly at a target or at a grid intersection. In the former case, you make a ranged touch attack against your target. In the latter case, you make a ranged attack against Armor Class 5. A splash weapon has a range increment of 10 feet unless another is specified in the weapon description.
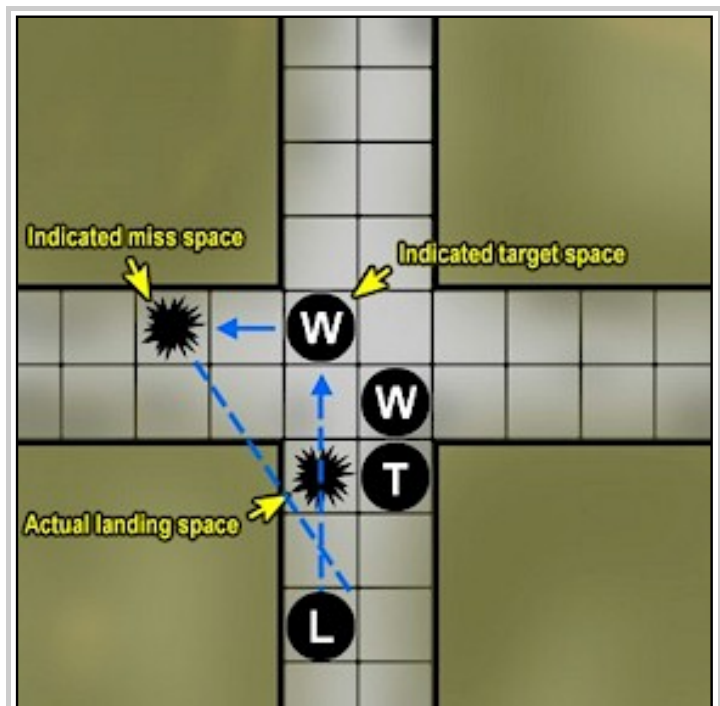
When you hit a target with a splash weapon, the contents sprays out over the target and everything within 5 feet of that target. The target struck takes damage for a direct hit; other targets take splash damage. The splash weapon's direct and splash damage ratings are given in the weapon's description.

Though the rules aren't entirely clear on the matter, I suggest that you apply splash damage to all adjacent targets only when the primary target fills one 5-foot space or less -- that is, Medium or smaller targets. Against a Large or bigger target, apply splash damage only against secondary targets that are within 5 feet of the point of impact. To determine the point of impact, just have the attacker choose one of the squares the target occupies. The attacker must have line of effect to the square chosen.

If an attacker hits a grid intersection with a splash weapon, everything in the squares adjacent to the intersection takes splash damage from the weapon.

If the attacker using a splash weapon misses (either against a target attacked directly or against a grid intersection), use the procedure on page 158 in the *Player's Handbook* to determine where the weapon lands. Creatures and objects within 5 feet of the place where the weapon lands take splash damage.

When tossing splash weapons in a restricted area, it's possible that the rules will indicate that a miss puts a splash weapon someplace where the attacker couldn't possibly have thrown it. In such cases, determine the place where the splash weapon normally would land

Lidda (L) and Tordek (T) face two wights (W) at an intersection of corridors in a dungeon. While Tordek attacks one wight with his battleaxe, Lidda tosses a vial of holy water at the second wight, which is 20 feet away. Lidda makes a ranged touch attack against the wight. Lidda has a -8 penalty on the attack: -4 nonproficiency (which applies to all splash weapon attacks) and another -4 for attacking a target two range increments away (a splash weapon has a range increment of 10 feet). Lidda's attack misses, and Lidda's player must roll 1d8 to determine where the flask actually lands. The roll is a 3, indicating a miss to the left. The vial lands 10 feet to the left (5 feet per range increment; see page 158 in the

according to the rules on page 158. Then, trace a line from one corner of the attacker's space to the landing spot. To select the corner, you can allow the attacker to choose or simply select the corner that's nearest to the landing spot or the corner that seems most appropriate to the situation. Trace a line from the selected corner to the landing spot. The splash weapon actually lands at the first point where the line strikes a solid barrier. The accompanying diagram illustrates the process.

What's Next?

We're out of time for this week. Next week, we'll consider projectile weapons.

Player's Handbook).

Lidda, however, could not toss anything into the indicated space from where she stands, thanks to the wall on her left. To determine where the vial really lands, the DM traces a line from one corner of Lidda's space to a corner of the indicated landing space. The flask strikes where the line intersects the wall, splashing Tordek and the first wight with holy water (because they're both within 5 feet of the square where the vial actually landed).

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of **Dragon** *Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.